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# Appendix G

## Greater Sage-Grouse Mitigation Strategy



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## GREATER SAGE-GROUSE MITIGATION STRATEGY

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### GENERAL

In undertaking BLM/Forest Service management actions, and consistent with valid existing rights and applicable law, in authorizing third-party actions that result in habitat loss and degradation, the BLM/Forest Service will require and assure mitigation that provides a net conservation gain to the species, including accounting for any uncertainty associated with the effectiveness of such mitigation. This will be achieved by compensating for impacts by applying beneficial mitigation actions. Mitigation will follow the regulations from the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.20; e.g., avoid, minimize, and compensate), hereafter referred to as the mitigation hierarchy. If impacts from BLM/Forest Service management actions and authorized third-party actions that result in habitat loss and degradation remain after applying avoidance and minimization measures (i.e., residual impacts), then compensatory mitigation projects will be used to provide a net conservation gain to the species. Any compensatory mitigation will be durable, timely, and in addition to that which would have resulted without the compensatory mitigation (see **Glossary**).

The BLM/Forest Service, via the WAFWA Management Zone Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Team, will develop a WAFWA Management Zone Regional Mitigation Strategy that will inform the NEPA decision-making process, including the application of the mitigation hierarchy for BLM/Forest Service management actions and third-party actions that result in habitat loss and degradation. A robust and transparent Regional Mitigation Strategy will contribute to GRSG habitat conservation by reducing, eliminating, or minimizing threats and compensating for residual impacts to GRSG and its habitat.

The BLM's Regional Mitigation Manual, MS-1794, serves as a framework for developing and implementing a Regional Mitigation Strategy. The following sections provide additional guidance specific to the development and implementation of a WAFWA Management Zone Regional Mitigation Strategy.

### Developing a WAFWA Management Zone Regional Mitigation Strategy

The BLM/Forest Service, via the WAFWA Management Zone Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Team, will develop a WAFWA Management Zone Regional Mitigation Strategy to guide the application of the mitigation hierarchy for BLM/Forest Service management actions and third-party actions that result in habitat loss and degradation. The Regional Mitigation Strategy should consider any state-level GRSG mitigation guidance that is consistent with the requirements identified in this appendix. The Regional Mitigation Strategy should be developed in a transparent manner, based on the best science available and standardized metrics.

As described in **Chapter 2**, the BLM/Forest Service will establish a WAFWA Management Zone Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Team (hereafter, Team) to help guide the conservation of GRSG, within 90 days of the issuance of the Record of Decision. The Regional Mitigation Strategy will be developed within one year of the issuance of the Record of Decision.

The Regional Mitigation Strategy should include mitigation guidance on avoidance, minimization, and compensation, as follows:

- Avoidance
  - Include avoidance areas (e.g., right-of-way avoidance/exclusion areas, no surface occupancy areas) already included in laws, regulations, policies, and/or land use plans (e.g., Resource Management Plans, Forest Plans, and State Plans); and
  - Include any potential, additional avoidance actions (e.g., additional avoidance best management practices).
- Minimization
  - Include minimization actions (e.g., required design features and best management practices) already included in laws, regulations, policies, land use plans, and/or land-use authorizations; and
  - Include any potential, additional minimization actions (e.g., additional minimization best management practices).
- Compensation
  - Include discussion of impact/project valuation, compensatory mitigation options, siting, compensatory project types and costs, monitoring, reporting, and funds administration. Each of these topics is discussed in more detail below.
    - Residual Impact and Compensatory Mitigation Project Valuation Guidance

- A standardized method should be identified for estimating residual impacts and valuing compensatory mitigation projects.
- This method should consider the quality of habitat, scarcity of the habitat, and the size of the impact/project.
- For compensatory mitigation projects, consideration of durability (see glossary) and timelines (see glossary) may require adjustment of the valuation.
- **Compensatory Mitigation Options**
  - Options for implementing compensatory mitigation should be identified, such as:
    - Utilizing certified mitigation/conservation bank or credit exchanges
    - Contributing to an existing mitigation/conservation fund
    - Authorized-user conducted mitigation projects
- **Compensatory Mitigation Siting**
  - Sites should be in areas that have the potential to yield the greatest conservation benefit to the GRSG, regardless of land ownership.
  - Sites should be sufficiently durable (see glossary).
  - Sites identified by existing plans and strategies (e.g., fire restoration plans, invasive species strategies, and healthy land focal areas) should be considered, if those sites have the potential to yield the greatest benefit to GRSG and are durable.
- **Compensatory Mitigation Project Types and Costs**
  - Project types should be identified that help reduce threats to GRSG (e.g., protection, conservation, and restoration projects).
  - Each project type should have a goal and measurable objectives.

- Expected costs for these project types, within the WAFWA Management Zone, should be identified, including the costs to monitor and maintain the project for the duration of the impact.
- **Compensatory Mitigation Compliance and Monitoring**
  - Mitigation projects should be inspected to ensure they are implemented as designed, and if not, there should be methods to enforce compliance.
  - Mitigation projects should be monitored to ensure that the goals and objectives are met and that the benefits are effective for the duration of the impact.
- **Compensatory Mitigation Reporting**
  - Standardized, transparent, scalable, and scientifically defensible reporting requirements should be identified for mitigation projects.
  - Reports should be compiled, summarized, and reviewed in the WAFWA Management Zone in order to determine if GRSG conservation has been achieved and/or to support adaptive management recommendations.
- **Compensatory Mitigation Program Implementation Guidelines**
  - Guidelines for implementing the state-level compensatory mitigation program should include holding and applying compensatory mitigation funds, operating a transparent and credible accounting system, certifying mitigation credits, and managing reporting requirements.

### **Incorporating the Regional Mitigation Strategy into NEPA Analyses**

The BLM/Forest Service will include the avoidance, minimization, and compensatory recommendations from the Regional Mitigation Strategy in one or more of the NEPA analysis' alternatives for BLM/Forest Service management actions and third-party actions that result in habitat loss and degradation, and the appropriate mitigation actions will be carried forward into the decision.

### **Implementing a Compensatory Mitigation Program**

The BLM/Forest Service need to ensure that compensatory mitigation is strategically implemented to provide a net conservation gain to the species, as identified in the Regional Mitigation Strategy. In order to align with existing compensatory mitigation efforts, this compensatory mitigation program will be managed at a state level (as opposed to a WAFWA Management Zone, a Field Office, or a Forest), in collaboration with our partners (e.g., federal, tribal, and state agencies).

To ensure transparent and effective management of the compensatory mitigation funds, the BLM/Forest Service will enter into a contract or agreement with a third party to help manage the state-level compensatory mitigation funds, within one year of the issuance of the Record of Decision. The selection of the third-party compensatory mitigation administrator will conform to all relevant laws, regulations, and policies. The BLM/Forest Service will remain responsible for making decisions that affect federal lands.

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